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## CATS

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### I

A SLIM line of smoke rose straight upward from a cigarette held between two slender fingers. From the "lounge" off the ball-room a woman was so intent, watching two men, that for some moments she had forgotten to raise the cigarette to her lips.

There was dancing—plenty of it. Couples were swaying with the sensuous grace that is part of the lure of the modern dance. There was exchange of whispers, glances. Through it all, like a low, tremulous call to love, shivered the music.—But she was watching.

One of the men was her husband. She knew what the other was telling him. One of those charming friends of her own sex had taken special pains that evening to distil like poison into her ear the news that Ralph—the man who was talking to her husband—was engaged to Cora Langham.

The woman who told her had narrowly scanned her face to note the effect upon her of the sudden announcement. But all it evoked, was an indifferent "Oh, really?" and a curious smile that might mean anything, but looked so much like a sneer, that her informant, disconcerted by such unexpected composure, launched into a nervous panegyric of Ralph's fiancée.

"So sweet!—So naive and unsophisticated!—At least that's what we all think. And so clever!—Those exquisite gowns she wears, and her people not a bit well to do, for a girl who goes out

so much.—Makes them all herself! Told me so.—And isn't she just the dearest little thing in the world in them?—We're all so glad for her, and for Ralph too."

"Yes?"

And still that curious smile, so provoking because it implied so much, yet told so little. Her informant had counted upon being able to flit about the ball-room telling people how the married woman, whose name during the past year invariably had been coupled with Ralph's, had taken the news of his engagement to Cora. In point of fact, she hadn't "taken" it at all, and at present was looking indifferently across the room, where Ralph stood talking to her husband:—that husband, who was considered a model of his kind, because he had either been blind to what everyone else saw, or pre-occupied with an affair of his own, which, however, he had conducted with so much discretion that no one had been able to discover the woman. Now, seeing his wife looking in his direction, he slipped his arm with easy familiarity through Ralph's and piloted him to where she sat.

"Bess, Ralph has an interesting piece of news for you." Then he left him standing, sheepish and undecided, before her.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, looking up at him with her prettiest smile, for she knew every woman in the room was staring at them, "you don't have to tell me. Everyone is raving about

it—your engagement to Cora!—You've just told Jim, haven't you? Wasn't he pleased?"

"He was bully about it!"

"He ought to be. He knows her so well."

"Really?—Cora has only mentioned him once or twice, and then just casually."

"That may have been from motives of delicacy."

"I don't think I quite understand."

"Oh, I see. She hasn't told you. Jim, of course, wouldn't. Why—er—my dear Ralph—she and Jim—that is to say—Well—you must have happened along just about as Jim was getting tired of paying her dressmakers' bills and other very personal, not to say intimate, expenses; with her people—whom you won't find any too refined, anyhow—beginning to take advantage of the situation and 'laying down' on Jim for anything and everything.—I must say, Ralph, it's fine, real Christianlike of you to take her off Jim's hands. No wonder he's so 'bully about it.' He ought to be.—Don't you think so?"

She stopped, looked up at him with a cheerful little laugh. It was easy for her to see that he was convinced of the truth of what she had told him. It tal-

lied too well with certain suspicions that had begun to creep into his own mind, in spite of himself. She noted how, involuntarily, he clenched a fist. Then he recalled where and in whose presence he was; straightened up, bowed, and sauntered off—but not in the direction where Cora was sitting.

## II

"I can't say he looked as if the last five minutes were the most joyous of his life. Serves him right though, for not letting you know like a gentleman, instead of leaving it to that cat, who was sitting with you a little while ago, to tell you."

"That's why you led him up to the slaughter?"

"That's why."

She raised her cigarette, and took a whiff. The curve of the hand, the poise of the fingers, the pursing of the lips, as she emitted a delicate ring of smoke, were exquisite.

"Cutting out all the dead wood between us, Jim, how would you like to have me for your little playmate again?"

"Shall we begin by showing these idiots how to dance?"

She rose, placed herself in his arms, and, together, they glided into the ballroom, while everyone stared.